

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM BLANK AND INVALID VOTING?

Voters often go to the polls only to throw their vote away by leaving their ballot blank or intentionally spoiled. Typically construed as anomalous or errant, we argue that blank and spoiled ballots are empirically differentiable and politically informative.

We consider self-reported vote choice from a nationally representative survey following the 2011 Bolivian elections, in which 60 percent of votes cast were blank or spoiled. We estimate a multinomial logit model, finding that both blank and null voting were driven by political concerns, nullified ballots appear to be instrumental voting decisions made by politically sophisticated voters.

Voting is the cornerstone of democratic participation. Understanding the varied signals from different acts of voting can send gives critical insight into political contestation the quality of democracy more generally.

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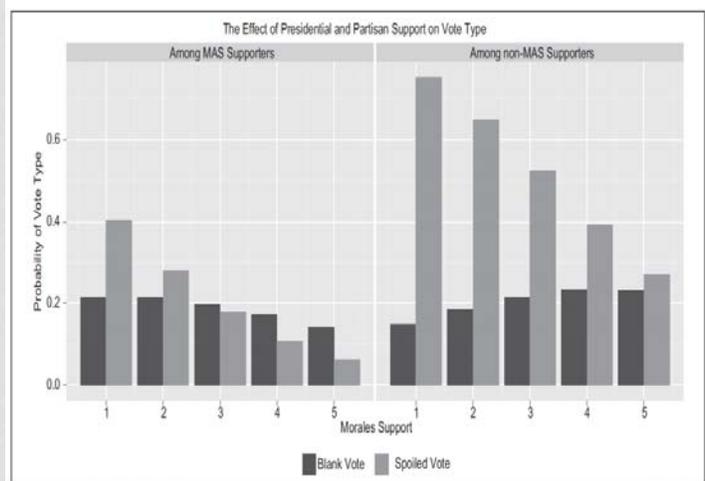


Figure 2. Probability of vote type in the 2011 Bolivian judicial elections. All other covariates are held at the mean (for interval-level) or modal (for dichotomous) values. MAS = Movement to Socialism party (Movimiento al Socialismo).

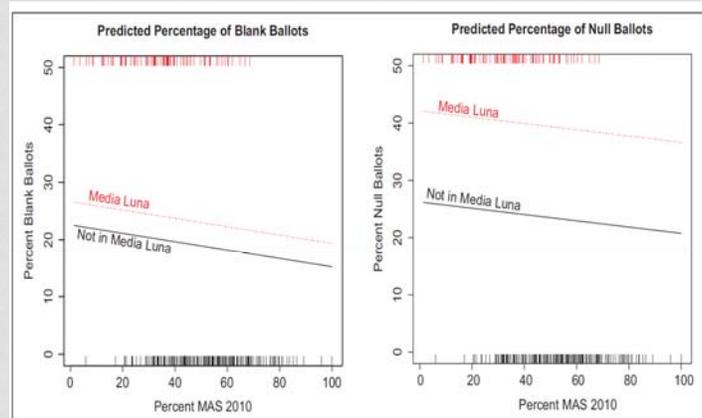


Figure 3. Predicted percentages of blank and spoiled ballots by residence in Media Luna and support for the MAS party. These predictions come from the model of vote invalidation for the 2011 Constitutional Tribunal elections in Table 4. MAS = Movement to Socialism party (Movimiento al Socialismo).

From Driscoll, Amanda and Michael Nelson, "Ignorance or Opposition?: Blank and Spoiled Votes in Low Information, Highly Politicized Environments," *Political Research Quarterly*, Forthcoming.